

Public Hearing – Monday, March 4, 2013
Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee

Testimony Submitted by Miloš Atz

S.B. No. 840 – An Act Concerning Next Generation Connecticut

My name is Miloš Atz and I am a junior studying chemical engineering at the University of Connecticut. I'd like to take a moment to thank those it may concern for the opportunity to present this testimony regarding Senate Bill No. 840 – An Act Concerning Next Generation Connecticut.

If passed, the Next Generation Connecticut bill will completely change our state's science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) landscape. It is the third state-funded initiative aimed at the University of Connecticut in the past eighteen years. UConn has wisely and strategically used the previous two, investing in new buildings, facilities, faculty, and infrastructure. I would know, because I will be an example of the return on that investment.

In a little over a year, I will graduate from the University of Connecticut School of Engineering. My fellow classmates and I, as alumni, will be direct products of the UConn 2000 and 21st Century UConn initiatives that continue to promote change and growth at our state's flagship university. Because of these bills, STEM degrees awarded by UConn have increased by 120%. My graduation will contribute to this statistic.

However, as a UConn graduate I will be more than just a statistic. UConn is equipping me with the technical skills and professional tools I need to excel in any work environment. This occurs inside and outside of the classroom. At this point in my academic career I have had the opportunities to perform undergraduate research, intern at a Connecticut chemical engineering company, and play leadership roles in various engineering-related student organizations like Engineering Ambassadors, a group that promotes STEM to younger students across the state. These experiences have made me the person who stands before you today and who will one day change the world.

Unfortunately, this is not enough. The Connecticut economy has an ever-increasing need for technically skilled STEM professionals. Nationally, growth in STEM jobs is three times as fast than that of non-STEM jobs, and two-thirds of GDP growth is driven by STEM innovation. On the state level, Connecticut – and, in turn, UConn – is struggling to meet this demand. Despite the growth made possible by UConn 2000 and 21st Century UConn, the University of Connecticut is simply not producing enough STEM graduates and this is negatively impacting our state's economy.

Next Generation Connecticut can change this. The bill will expand the university's STEM capacity by allowing for massive new faculty hires, increased STEM enrollments, and the new infrastructure necessary to accommodate this growth. Increased partnerships with technical and research-based industries will mean that UConn STEM graduates, like my classmates and myself, will remain in Connecticut and infuse the economy with new life and innovation. Investing in Connecticut's STEM capabilities is a smart and proven way to facilitate long-term economic benefits.

I will be a result of UConn-focused initiatives. Next Generation Connecticut will provide our state economy with more STEM professionals like me, trained and educated at an ever-improving world-class university. On behalf of myself, my classmates, the UConn STEM community, and the next generations of STEM students and professionals, I would like to offer my support of Senate Bill No. 840 – An Act Concerning Next Generation Connecticut.

Thank you.

Miloš Atz
212 Natchaug Drive
Glastonbury, CT 06033